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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Washington, D.C. 20520

Thompson

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October 15, 1975

To: The Secretary
From: William G. Hyland *WGH*

Comments on Embassy Kinshasa Cable on Angola

The basic thrust of this critique and recommendations (Tab A) is that we should limit our commitment in Angola because the risk of becoming more deeply involved outweighs any objectives that are within our grasp. The Embassy officers -- who, not having been briefed, are only deducing the nature and extent of our Angolan operations -- estimate that the present policy has only the slimmest chance of success; they fear that unless we limit our commitment to Mobutu he will overreach himself and the net result will be that either he will opt out after achieving his own immediate aims, or that he will go so far that his position in Zaire will be endangered.

1. Objectives

The Embassy officers start with a statement of our maximum objectives: to block a communist or communist-dominated government in Angola, and to remain ostensibly neutral in doing so.

-- This ignores some other aspects: to demonstrate to Mobutu and Kaunda (and other Africans) that we are not paralyzed, that as a great power we will stand against the intrusion of Soviet power.

-- This is especially important if Zaire is in a shaky position; certainly, Mobutu is more likely to turn against the US if he thought we were passive observers and had no concern at all about his problems than if we make some effort to help him.

2. Risks

The risks described by the Embassy are self-evident ones:
(1) Mobutu may opt for a narrow solution preserving his own aims;

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(2) Zaire could overcommit itself, and destroy Mobutu's own regime; (3) a Zairian grab for Cabinda would compromise his image and jeopardize his American and European financial assistance; (4) we could lose Congressional support, especially for an extended or escalating commitment, and this is precisely the required kind of commitment to win, if the Soviets have the determination to outlast us; (5) we lose credibility if, having supported friendly forces in Angola, we are forced to climb down; (6) too close an involvement with Mobutu in an unpopular involvement in Angola will jeopardize our relations with a successor.

The risks of the present course would have to be weighed against the risks of any alternative: for example, it is likely that Zaire will opt for its own solution in any case; that Cabinda is clearly up for grabs; that we lose credibility if we take no action, just as much as if we make some effort; Congressional support cannot be an overriding criterion, since it can oscillate on any given issue, and would probably not be opposed to success.

The only serious analytical point is the danger of Mobutu's going too far because he will assume that we have given him a blank check. This is a valid appreciation of the risks, and certainly one that has to be faced as the present commitment is exhausted.

3. Recommendations

The Embassy recommendation seems naive, or, if not naive, almost guaranteed to produce the results they warn against. Their recommendations are: (1) fix a sustainable level of involvement with fail-safe check points such as no shipment of US-supplied weapons, no advisors; (2) inform Mobutu, Savimbi and Roberto that our support is not unlimited; (3) make clear to Mobutu that too open and deep involvement in Angola could jeopardize US and other bilateral financial assistance; (4) spell out the following objectives to Mobutu: (a) settle for less than optimum, i.e., a coalition government; (b) the US advocates free elections in Angola and Cabinda; (c) US does not encourage Mobutu to take action in Cabinda; (5) continue to "challenge the communist initiative" -- but make an international demand for a ceasefire and negotiations under US auspices; (6) lobby for free elections.

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If we were to adopt this course, then all the major participants would have to conclude that we were close to opting out altogether: explaining the limit of our commitment at this time can only be read in this way; calling for free elections and hinting we can accept a coalition, at this critical juncture, can only guarantee that each of our participants will conclude we are looking for a way out and suggesting they do the same. In this case, the Embassy's prediction of failure almost certainly would then prove correct.

Overall, this seems a typical "dissent": a fairly well-reasoned critique, but limp and with almost meaningless alternative policy suggestions.

The Present Prospects

Leaving aside this message, however, the outlook is not promising:

-- It is highly unlikely that either the FNLA or UNITA will gain any significant ground between now and the Portuguese withdrawal.

-- MPLA will have a strong territorial and military position, and will gain the recognition of a large number of African and Soviet bloc countries.

-- FNLA and Mobutu will not acquiesce in MPLA domination; some level of fighting will continue; Savimbi will be more of a question mark, but will probably continue in opposition to the MPLA.

-- A last-minute facade of coalition might be arranged by the OAU, but it will not last.

Thus, the Embassy is correct in a sense in raising the question of the limits of our commitment in the political circumstances that are likely to prevail in mid-November.

The outlook is for a continuing civil war and a temporary partition of Angola. Over time, the MPLA, assuming strong Soviet support, will gain control over most of the country, forcing Savimbi to come to terms, especially if Kaunda believes he must deal with the MPLA for access to the sea; in this case, Mobutu will probably also look to a settlement, and probably seize Cabinda -- or have it occupied by FLEC elements he controls -- in the process.

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The main point for the US is that the African participants should not be led to this conclusion because they find us a weak reed; if they choose to live with the MPLA in Angola, it must be their decision and not ours.

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